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ABSTRACT

Provided in the handbook for special teachers of elementary level visually handicapped students are guidelines for changing negative attitudes of school personnel, parents, and students to assure positive integration of visually handicapped children in the regular school setting. The handbook is said to have resulted from an institute that focused on the role of teachers in fostering independence and socialization of students with visual handicaps. Guidelines are given for providing information about visual impairment to staff members, parents, and regular teachers; promoting positive public relations in ways such as showing films about visual handicaps to regular classes; promoting positive attitudes about the special program for the visually impaired among regular teachers, seeing children, visually handicapped students, and parents; coordinating team planning and case conferences; providing regular teachers with special materials such as braille books; and being supportive to the regular teacher. (MC)

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TEACHER - PUPIL PACKAGE

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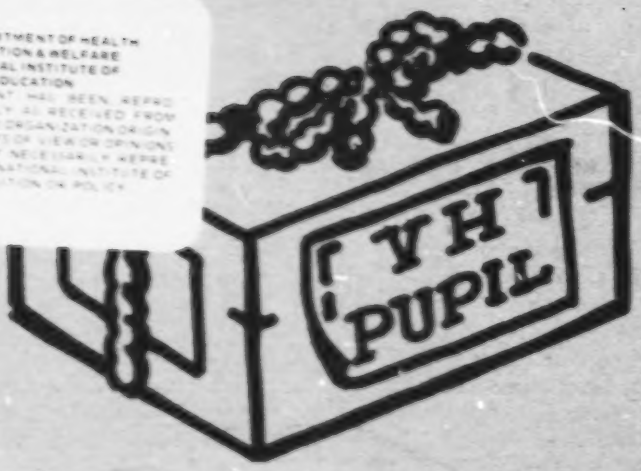

VISUALLY HANDICAPPED HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

This Teacher-Pupil Package Handbook was developed FOR YOU.

Many capable visually impaired persons find and hold hundreds of various types of jobs in administrative, professional, semi-professional, industrial, service and other fields of occupation. Yet there are many who may find or be placed in positions in the world of work who are not successful.

What makes the difference?

Can something positive be done about it?

This concern and thinking on the part of personnel in the State Department of Education lead to the Teacher-Pupil Package for Visually Handicapped Children. This Special Study Institute, a federal project written by the State Special Education Consultant for the Visually Impaired, Dr. Arselia Sehler, was directed to Career Readiness for the Visually Handicapped; Implications for Elementary School Programs. Funds were made available through Part D of Public Law 91-230.

The Institute was designed to involve teams of teachers of the blind and partially seeing and their principals. Supportive curriculum and learning specialists were also included.

The Planning Committee for this Study was drawn from areas interested in the problem; Bureau of Blind Services in the Department of Social Services, Special Education Services and Vocational Rehabilitation Services in the Department of Education as well as teachers and administrators of public and residential schools and university personnel in the field of Special Education.

This committee determined that in the three days available for the Institute, the participants should direct their full attention to independence and socialization. It was noted that the visually impaired who did not succeed at their jobs lacked the skills and finesse needed to hold a position. It was felt that the major emphasis should be placed at the early elementary school level. If fundamental life skills are to become part of an individual's fibre they must be cultivated and developed as early as possible.

To become apt and aware of these facts, teachers too must know how they function and relate as human beings if they are to be skillful in teaching children in human relations.

These key facts lead to the Teacher-Pupil Package Institute which was held on November 20-22 in East Lansing. The institute focused first on the processes of developmental learning and prescriptive teaching in the areas of independence and socialization. Secondly, if visually impaired children are to be successfully integrated in public schools then the public needs assistance in changing its attitudes toward these children. Two sessions were devoted to this later point resulting in the suggestions found in this booklet.

Program Director
Margaret S. Polzien

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

The job of the special education teacher in the public school setting is multi-faceted. In addition to providing direct services to children, he must handle many other responsibilities: providing general information about the visual impairment and attempting to build positive attitudes of acceptance in parents, teachers and other students; "selling" his program to administrators and teachers; and coordinating the efforts of many professionals to facilitate the education of his students. This job is not an easy one and it sometimes may be difficult to decide on the best approach in a given situation.

The following strategies, developed by experienced teachers, are designed to present various ways of becoming more effective with visually impaired individuals. Many of the suggestions coming out of the Institute could not be isolated into discreet categories, but in the interest of organization have been grouped under the following general headings:

Providing Information About the Visual Impairment
Promoting Positive Public Relations
Promoting Positive Attitudes about the Program for the Visually Impaired in the Public School
Coordinating Team Planning and Case Conferences
Providing Special Materials to the Regular Teachers
Being Supportive to the Regular Grade Teacher

PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT THE VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

Providing General Information to all Staff Members and Parents

- Provide an in-service training session for all staff members at the school to:
  - help them become better acquainted with what the resource room teacher is doing
  - define the role of the teacher/counselor or resource room teacher
  - answer questions

- At the beginning of the year, talk to teachers who have visually impaired children in group situations about teaching implications due to the physical impairment.

- Help regular classroom teachers plan for work with visually impaired children with the benefit of plenty of information and feedback.

- Provide direction to teachers about facilities and services available in addition to the teacher/counselor.

- Provide books and films about visual impairment for the staff of the school where the child is enrolled.

- Have the regular classroom teacher visit a resource room to see visually impaired children "in action". Provide opportunity for discussion about educational implications.

- Plan a PTA program to describe classrooms and specific programs. Discuss with parents of "normal" children their fears and fantasies about having their child associate with a blind child.

Providing Specific Information to the Regular Teacher

- Before the child enters the classroom or school, help the classroom teacher and the parents learn what to expect and how to adapt the program to the visually impaired child's needs and limitations. Acquaint them with special techniques and materials.

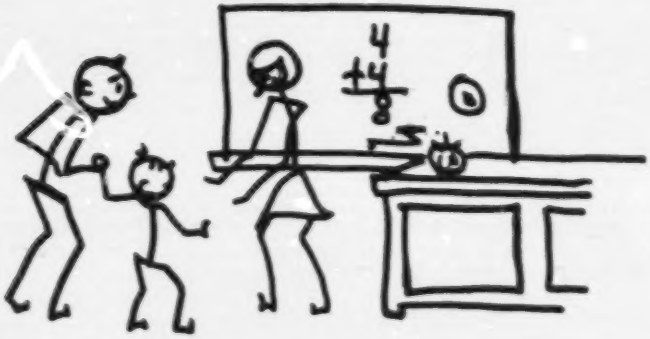
- Provide the teacher with a background of the students involved, information about the types of materials that may meet with the most success, giving demonstrations if necessary.

- Present the teacher with the possible limitations the vision will present. Give reassurance that you will help when needed.

- Have the regular teacher observe and get acquainted with the child in the special classroom. Offer complete information about the child and if possible, make a home call together to gain a better understanding of the child's environment.

- Relate information about the child's eye condition and the educational implication, if any, to the teacher.

- Hold an orientation meeting for all teachers involved with the student (classroom, art, physical education, music, etc.) to explain the services which are available, materials, etc.



- Extend yourself to teachers at their available time to provide specific information. Consult with teachers frequently to tackle problems as they arise.

- At the beginning of each semester, visit every teacher with the visually handicapped child. Students can be quite articulate in explaining the various accomodations they require. The teacher has the opportunity to discuss her apprehensions with the student and the teacher/counselor. This relieves tension and the teachers are often more accepting.

- Give the teacher insight into current behavioral problems of the visually impaired student and scholastic problems due to the impairment.

- Give the classroom teacher information about the abilities of the student that can be stressed and reinforced and disabilities that should be remembered.

PROMOTING POSITIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS

- Provide detailed explanations of the child's history to the superintendent, principal, guidance counselor and the teachers involved with the child. Follow up with regular progress reports.

- Sell the administrators on the value of having a visually impaired child enroll in the regular junior high rather than a special program. (Be certain that you are aware of the child's ability to cope with a particular educational arrangement.)

- Prepare the total environment, including the superintendent, personnel office and building principal. Seek assistance from the administration to select the most interested teacher(s) to work with the visually impaired students.

- Work through the high school counseling department in selecting regular classroom teachers who are accepting and open with their regular students. Conduct staffings with these teachers to establish ways to plan for the integration of the visually impaired high school student.

- Take the opportunity to associate with the regular classroom teachers in common social and professional settings to open doors to understanding. The more that teachers come in contact with each other and begin to share common concerns regarding educational goals, parent involvement, administrative hang-ups, etc., the more they begin to look at each other as people with a common concern--teaching children. This opens the door for integration of a visually impaired child into the regular classroom.

- Work with the regular classroom teacher to present various films, demonstrations and discussions so that the teacher and students can better understand the limitations of the visually impaired student and appreciate his efforts.

- Offer yourself for various services, providing information available on the child and on the program. Develop a good rapport with all building personnel.

- Share ideas with other teachers; become attuned to their needs.
- Pool your resources with the classroom teacher. Involve some of her teaching load with your class.
- Provide for curriculum expansion by offering mini-courses, such as "braille as another communication system."
- Participate in the school curriculum. Team teach with the regular teacher in subject areas.
- Offer your services to "normal" children who need tutoring or remediation in a particular area.
- Become involved in the regular class program through observation and participation to aid in acceptance and understanding of the visually impaired child by his teacher and classmates.
- Help the teacher handle problems and develop coping skills by:
  defining behaviors which are most disturbing
  selecting target behaviors for modification
  setting realistic expectations for change
  developing management techniques for consistent handling
  working out an evaluation process
  maintaining communication
  re-evaluating as needed.

PROMOTING POSITIVE ATTITUDES ABOUT THE PROGRAM FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

Promoting Positive Attitudes in the Regular Teachers

- Point out the positive, non-academic accomplishments of the visually impaired child.
- Be confident, positive and resourceful with the teachers, students, parents and administrators.
- Demonstrate that the visually impaired child is more like other children than different. He has the same needs, feelings and interests.
- Let the visually impaired children tell about themselves; what they can do and how they learn. Show through demonstrations using maps, braillewriters, abaci, etc.
- Allow for the visually handicapped child to take responsibility, have a place in leadership in the school.
- Begin an integration program by sending the visually impaired child to the regular classroom for only such subjects as music, story time, social studies and play time where success is almost certain.
- Lecture to all biology classes on blindness and vision problems, utilizing the blind students as resource persons.
- Let the on-going program sell itself. As teachers see the visually impaired students in the halls and as they visit the resource room, they can observe students working capably. Word-of-mouth from teachers who have successful experiences with visually impaired students can also be helpful.

Promoting Positive Attitudes in the "Normal" Children

- During the sharing time in the regular classroom have the visually impaired student read an original story, news report, etc., to give the other children a better understanding of his ability.

- Teach a lesson on braille in the regular classroom. Take some of the mystery out of what the blind child does.

- Blindfold the youngsters and teach a sample lesson as though they were blind.

- Invite children from the regular class to participate in joint activities with the partially sighted or blind youngsters. (Spelling bee, dramatizations or other oral activities.)

Promoting Positive Attitudes in the Visually Impaired Students

- Help the students to understand their limitations and face them realistically, whether it involves reading braille, accepting help graciously, or sitting closer to the front of the room.

- Determine the child's perception of his classroom experience by allowing him to verbalize his feelings. Help the child to effect changes in his behavior which might cause the regular teacher to see him in a more positive light.

- Provide the child with the tools of independence (mobility) and social skills (grooming, eating, posture, dressing) which will allow him to see himself as a capable individual.

Promoting Positive Attitudes in Parents

- Provide for full involvement of the family before the child enters school.
- Include parents in helping their visually impaired child see himself realistically.
- Provide positive inputs similar to those listed under Attitudes in Teachers.
- Work with parents to help them coordinate efforts and services for their child, rather than the teacher/counselor assuming all responsibility.
- Show parents how they might help the child at home. Help them to deal with problems as they arise.

COORDINATING TEAM PLANNING AND CASE CONFERENCES

- Plan appropriate program and placement for the visually impaired child by sharing information and utilizing as many resources as possible.

- Plan for interaction between all those involved with the child (parents, teachers, health department, doctor, school psychologist, social worker) with the teacher/counselor serving as coordinator.

- Set up a communication system for ready feedback for all those connected with the student. See next suggestion.

- Hold monthly conferences with all teachers to discuss progress, problems and recommended procedures. The student may be involved in the later stages of this conference.

- Check regularly with each teacher on the progress of the student in the classroom. Find out what materials will be needed in the near future that should be adapted for use by the visually impaired child.

- Hold staffing sessions to work out specific problems as they arise.

- Plan for parent-teacher conferences to involve all of the teachers who work with the student.

- Stress to the regular classroom teacher the need for helping the child gain independence and self-sufficiency.

- Plan cooperatively with the regular classroom teacher. Share responsibility for the child's success.

- Make full use of community resources such as the Greater Detroit Society for the Blind, Office of Services for the Blind, and Volunteer Groups.

PROVIDING SPECIAL MATERIALS TO THE REGULAR TEACHERS

- Have special materials (books, worksheets, blue ditto lines inked over, etc.) in the regular room so that they are ready for use by the teachers.

- Demonstrate adaptations of materials and methods necessary to include the visually handicapped student in the on-going class program.

- Offer special materials for total school usage, making them readily available to both students and teachers. These materials can often benefit the entire class and decrease the emphasis on "special" status. Braille materials can be included in the school library.

- Share equipment, not just texts. (Be sure to have a check-out system.)

- Offer and follow through on help with the child, such as brailling, making yarn pictures, maps, etc. Show the teacher how to use these with the child.

- Have volunteers ready to tape or braille special materials and tests.

BEING SUPPORTIVE TO THE REGULAR GRADE TEACHER

- Provide continuous support, reinforcement, praise and recognition of extra effort by the teacher.
- Be prompt and available at a convenient time for the teacher involved and be ready to respond to a call for help.
- Provide regular and continuous follow-up when a child is integrated. Do not wait until problems arise.
- Define the child's behavior to the teacher; help her plan to accomodate the child in the regular classroom; empathize with her concern and take responsibility for the academic progress or lack of it. Confer on a regular basis.
- Discuss specific techniques of teaching visually impaired students when any adaptations are necessary.
- Be empathetically interested in the special problems, including transportation, eating skills, mobility, leisure time activities, counseling and setting realistic long term educational and vocational goals.

- Build the teacher's confidence in her ability to provide a positive educational experience for this child. Be free with genuine praise.

- Provide continuous resource support as well as personal support for a difficult teaching situation. Demonstrate workable methods. Show an acceptance of her fears, anxieties and concerns.

CONCLUSION

All children have a right to an education which will help them realize their full potential. This is no less true for children with visual impairment. It is therefore the full responsibility of teachers and teacher counselors to expend all means to realize this goal.

Some of the recommendations made on the preceeding pages are already being used in many school districts with success. It is hoped others will find them useful so that in the future visually impaired children will become integrated more easily into regular programs.